

Travis Community Impact Supervision

**Thinking About Location: Orienting Probation to
Neighborhood Based Supervision**

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Summary

The Travis County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) in Austin, Texas (the county's adult probation department) has teamed up with *The JFA Institute* in a two-year effort to reengineer the operations of the department to support more effective supervision strategies. The goal is to strengthen probation by using an evidence-based practices (EBP) model.

The Travis County CSCD, the Community Justice Assistance Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and the Open Society Institute have provided funds to support the reengineering effort and use the department as an "incubator" site to develop, test and document organization-wide changes directed at improving assessment, supervision, sanctioning, personnel training and quality control policies. The Travis County CSCD is the fifth largest probation system in the state and, as such, has tremendous impact on the state probation system. The total number of offenders under some form of probation supervision in Travis County in FY 2005 was 22,827.

In this reengineering effort, *The JFA Institute* provides research, technical assistance in managing organizational changes and documents the efforts working with the department. Dr. Tony Fabelo is directing the project on behalf of *The JFA Institute*. Dr. Geraldine Nagy, the Director of the Travis County probation department, is directing the overall reform effort in conjunction with senior management staff of the department. The effort is supported by Travis County criminal law judges, the district and county attorneys and the Travis County Community Justice Council.

This is the fifth incubator site report. This report presents an analysis of the geographical location of the Travis County probation population using mapping technology. The analysis was conducted by Eric Cadora and his team at the *JFA Mapping Center* in New York City.

A great number of the persons entering and exiting the Texas prison system and persons on probation tend to concentrate in specific neighborhoods in our large metropolitan areas. Mapping analysis identifies these concentrations in specific geographical locations. The goal is to provide a visual depiction of the geographical distribution of the probation population to identify high density neighborhoods that can be targeted for a neighborhood based supervision approach. The neighborhood based approach consolidates caseloads with fewer officers specifically assigned to supervising probationers in those locations. This can be done in Travis County in at least three neighborhoods. The research also shows that neighborhoods receiving the most offenders released from prison are also neighborhoods with a high concentration of probationers. Present supervision practices between the probation and parole agencies in these neighborhoods are not coordinated. Collaboration between these agencies may lead to more effective supervision that leverages resources between the agencies and between the agencies and neighborhood partners.

The visualization of concentrated parole and probation populations in what we call "high stakes" communities is critical for more effective policy. The notion is that, although we need policies that address the overall issue of criminality and the supervision of justice populations regardless of where persons are committing crimes or where they live, we also need to consider the location of concentrated justice populations.

I. Introduction

The Travis County Community Supervision and Corrections Department (CSCD) in Austin, Texas (the county's adult probation department) has teamed up with *The JFA Institute* in a two-year effort to reengineer the operations of the department to support more effective supervision strategies. The goal is to strengthen probation by using an evidence-based practices (EBP) model. This realignment strategy is called the Travis Community Impact Supervision (TCIS). This name was chosen to purposely distinguish this agency-wide effort from departments in Texas and around the country that have implemented limited components of an evidence-based approach but have not been able to implement or sustain evidence-based principles throughout the organization.

The Travis County CSCD, the Community Justice Assistance Division of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and the Open Society Institute have provided funds to support the reengineering effort and use the department as an "incubator" site to develop, test and document organization-wide changes directed at improving assessment, supervision, sanctioning, personnel training and quality control policies. The Travis County CSCD is the fifth largest probation system in the state and, as such, has tremendous impact on the state probation system. The total number of offenders under some form of probation supervision in Travis County in FY 2005 was 22,827.

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This is the fifth incubator site report. The first report, in January 2006, provided a context for understanding the importance of having a site that can be used to develop a successful approach for implementing organization-wide evidence-based practices.¹ The second report reviewed the strategies that are being implemented to strengthen probation assessment practices using evidence-based assessment tools.² The third incubator report examined the importance of using risk assessment instruments to guide justice decisions and profile the risk of the Travis probation population.³ The fourth incubator report reviewed the results of research conducted to determine the supervision needs profile of the Travis County probation population. The research was based on the assessment of offenders placed on probation for a six week period using the Strategies for Case Supervision (SCS) assessment tool.⁴

¹ Dr. Tony Fabelo and Dr. Geraldine Nagy, "Texas Community Impact Supervision: An Incubator Site to Improve Probation" *The JFA Institute*, Washington, DC/Austin, Texas. January 2006.

² Dr. Tony Fabelo and Dr. Geraldine Nagy, "Better Diagnosis: The First Step to Improve Probation Supervision Strategies" *The JFA Institute*, Washington, DC/Austin, Texas. June 2006.

³ Jason Bryl, Dr. Tony Fabelo and Dr. Geraldine Nagy, "Guiding Justice Decisions with Risk Assessment Instruments" *The JFA Institute*, Washington, DC/Austin, Texas. June 2006.

⁴ Jason Bryl, Dr. Tony Fabelo and Dr. Geraldine Nagy, "Assessing Supervision Needs: A Profile of the Travis Probation Population" *The JFA Institute*, Washington, DC/Austin, Texas. September 2006.

This report presents an analysis of the geographical location of the Travis County probation population using mapping technology. The analysis was conducted by Eric Cadora and his team at the *JFA Mapping Center* in New York City. The goal is to provide a graphic depiction of the geographical distribution of the probation population to identify high density neighborhoods that can be targeted for a neighborhood based supervision approach. The neighborhood based approach consolidates caseloads among fewer officers assigned to supervising probationers in those locations.

II. The Concept of Location

A. Methodology

A great number of the persons entering and exiting the Texas prison system and persons on probation tend to concentrate in specific neighborhoods in our large metropolitan areas. Visualizing these concentrations in specific geographical locations is done through the use of mapping analysis.

In this report we use two sets of data for the mapping analysis. First, a prison data set is used to show a general picture of the location of persons being released from prison to parole or mandatory supervision in Texas to visualize the importance of location for policy making. This data set is for persons that were released from prison to parole or mandatory supervision in 2005. These persons have a supervision plan with a physical address upon release and these addresses are used for the mapping analysis. Address data were unavailable for persons being discharged from prison or State Jails, and privacy issues prevented the release of address data for persons participating in the substance abuse treatment programs in the Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) program. Therefore, the maps only capture about 80% of the persons being released from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) incarceration or treatment facilities.

The second data set is used for a more detailed analysis of the residency of the probation population in Travis County to explore how supervision strategies can be changed to consider the concentration of probationers in certain neighborhoods. This data set is for persons who were under probation supervision in Travis County as of February 2005. These records also have addresses depicting the residency of the persons under supervision at that snapshot point that were used for the mapping analysis.

The visualization of the location of these populations in what we call “high stakes” communities is critical to the development of more effective criminal justice policy. The notion is that, although we need policies that address the overall issue of criminality and the supervision of justice populations regardless of where offenders live, we also need to start thinking about the locations where justice populations are concentrated. These locations tend to be in poor urban neighborhoods that also have a high proportion of persons on welfare, and relatively deficient schools. Supervision and program delivery strategies that consider the concentration of these populations may lead to more effective policies to improve prison re-entry and reduce parole and probation revocations.

b. Visualizing Location in Texas

Most prisoners come from and return to a few inner-city neighborhoods in the largest cities. Figure 1 shows a count of the number of people released from prison to parole or mandatory supervision to each county in Texas over the course of a year. As can be seen, ten counties in Texas received almost 35% of all releases to parole or mandatory supervision. Harris County received the largest percentage of prison releases (almost 17%). Harris County also accounted for the largest percentage of offenders admitted to prison (not shown). Travis County accounted for 3.5% of all prison releases.

Figure 1: Discretionary Releases from Prison by County, Texas Map

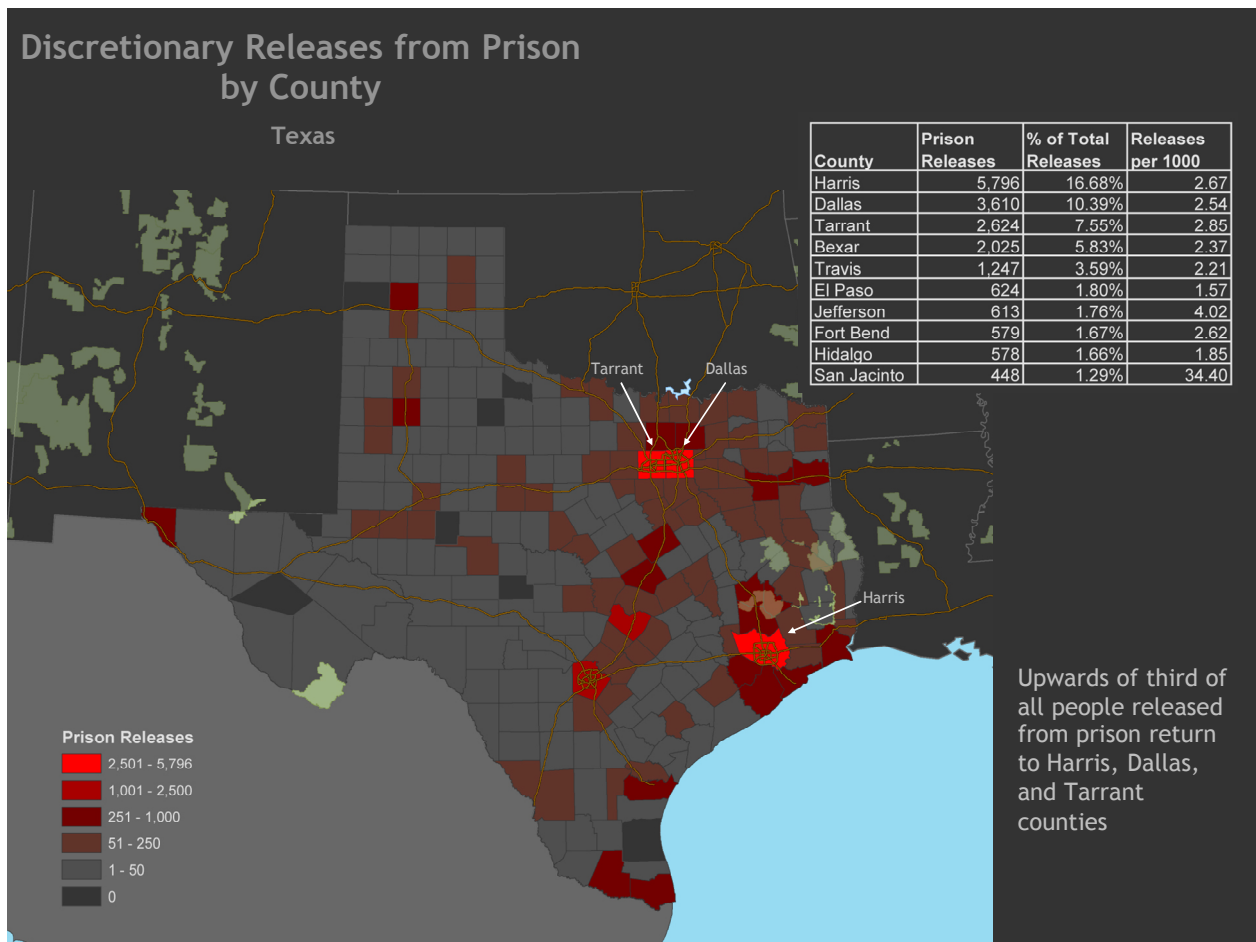
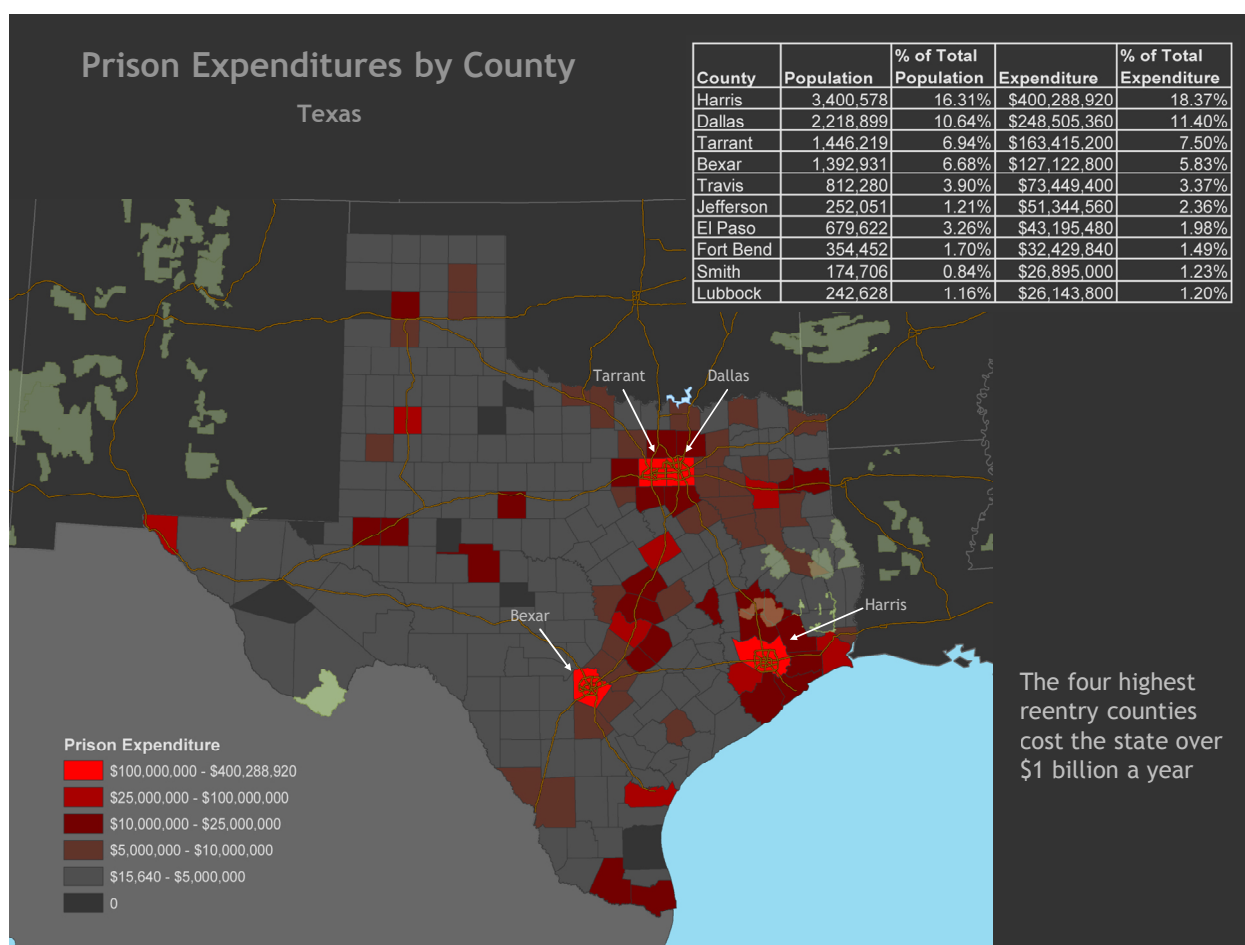


Figure 2 shows the prison expenditures by county for the particular population analyzed. This cost was calculated by multiplying the number of days each person stayed in prison (time served) by the average cost of incarcerating a person in Texas in 2004 (\$40.06).⁵ Persons released to Harris County cost the state about \$400 million a year in incarceration costs.⁶ Harris County accounted for 16% of the state population but 18% of the state prison expenditures. This is due mainly to longer prison sentences given in Harris County. Persons released to Travis County accounted for \$73.4 million in incarceration costs. Travis accounted for almost 4% of the state population but 3.3% percent of the prison expenditures.

Figure 2: Prison Expenditures by County, Texas Map

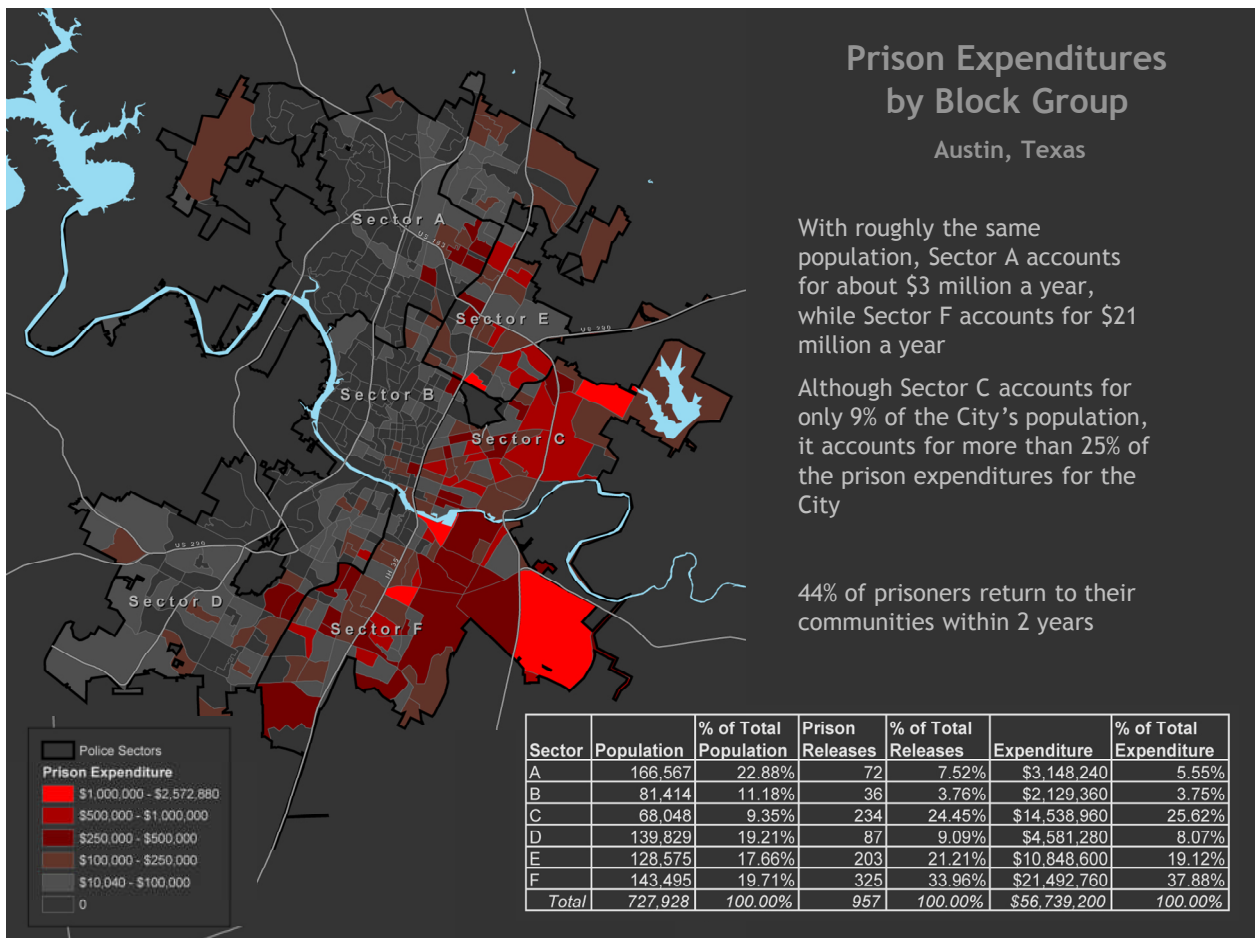


⁵ Legislative Budget Board, January 2005. "Criminal Justice Uniform Cost Report, FY 2003-2004."

⁶ If the same number of persons are admitted and released each year, and they serve the average time served for persons released to that locality in the future, this will be the yearly cost in the future. However, there are variations in the number of persons admitted and released from the different localities and variation in their time served so this cost is a rough estimate of potential yearly costs in the future. Also the cost depicted here does not include the cost of persons discharged from prison and persons released from the State Jails and SAJP facilities. No data were available to include these persons in the analysis, otherwise, the cost above will be significantly higher.

Figure 3 shows the prison expenditures by block group (city blocks) in Austin, Texas. The vast majority of prison spending for the city of Austin is accounted for by a few small census block-group areas. Over a quarter of the nearly \$60 million dollars a year in prison spending for Austin residents is accounted for by a few block-groups in Sector C, where only 9% of the adult population resides. As we will show later, this area of the city is also one in which probationers tend to concentrate. Given that approximately 44% of prisoners return home within two years, and given that most probationers reside close to or in the same areas, there is a clear need for probation and parole agencies to coordinate supervision strategies at the neighborhood level. In general, probation and parole agencies do not coordinate supervision. They also do not leverage resources between themselves or between themselves and neighborhood partners. Although this report only concentrates on the probation component, an important consideration in the future is better coordination of parole and probation supervision in these high stakes neighborhoods, leading to better supervision results.

Figure 3: Prison Expenditures by Block Group, Austin, Texas Map



III. Probationers in Neighborhoods in Travis County

Travis County is home to Austin, the capital city of Texas. The county has 989 square miles and a population of 888,185 in the 2005 U.S. Census estimate. This is up by 9.3% from the population of 812,280 of 2000. The population of “white persons, not Hispanic” represented 53% of the county’s population with “persons of Hispanic or Latino origin” representing 31% and “Black persons” representing about 9%. Travis has a relatively highly educated population in relation to Texas in general, with about 41% of the population composed of persons with a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, compared to 36% for Texas. Per capita household income was also higher than for Texas in general, at \$45,245 compared to \$39,967 for the state.⁷

Figure 4 shows the probationers per 1,000 adults by zip code in Travis County. The map is color coded by the rate of probationers per 1000 adults who live within each zip. The brightest red zip codes represent rates between 30 and 50 probationers per 1000 adults, while the darkest brown zips represent the lowest rate with between 5 and 10 probationers per 1000 adults. Note that the lowest rates are sometimes adjacent to the highest, at about one-tenth their rate.

Probationers are highly concentrated in particular neighborhoods throughout Travis County, but primarily in city of Austin zip codes. About 25% of the County’s residents live in neighborhoods which are home to 42% of the County’s probationers. The largest number of probationers lives in the east side of the city, which tends to be home for a larger proportion of the Hispanic and African-American residents of Austin. It is also that part of the city in which persons of lower income tend to reside. Zip codes 78745 and 78741 in the south-east of Austin have the largest number of probationers, 1,154 and 1,113 respectively. This contrasts sharply with zip codes in the west part of the city, which have relatively low numbers of probationers. The west part of the city tends to be the residential areas for the higher income population of Austin.

The concentration of probationers follow the same distribution, with those zip codes that have 30 to 52 probationers per 1,000 population in the east of Austin while those having 5 to 10 probationers per 1,000 population being in the west of Austin.

⁷ US Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, Travis County

Figure 4: Probationers per 1000 Adults by Zip Code, Travis County Map

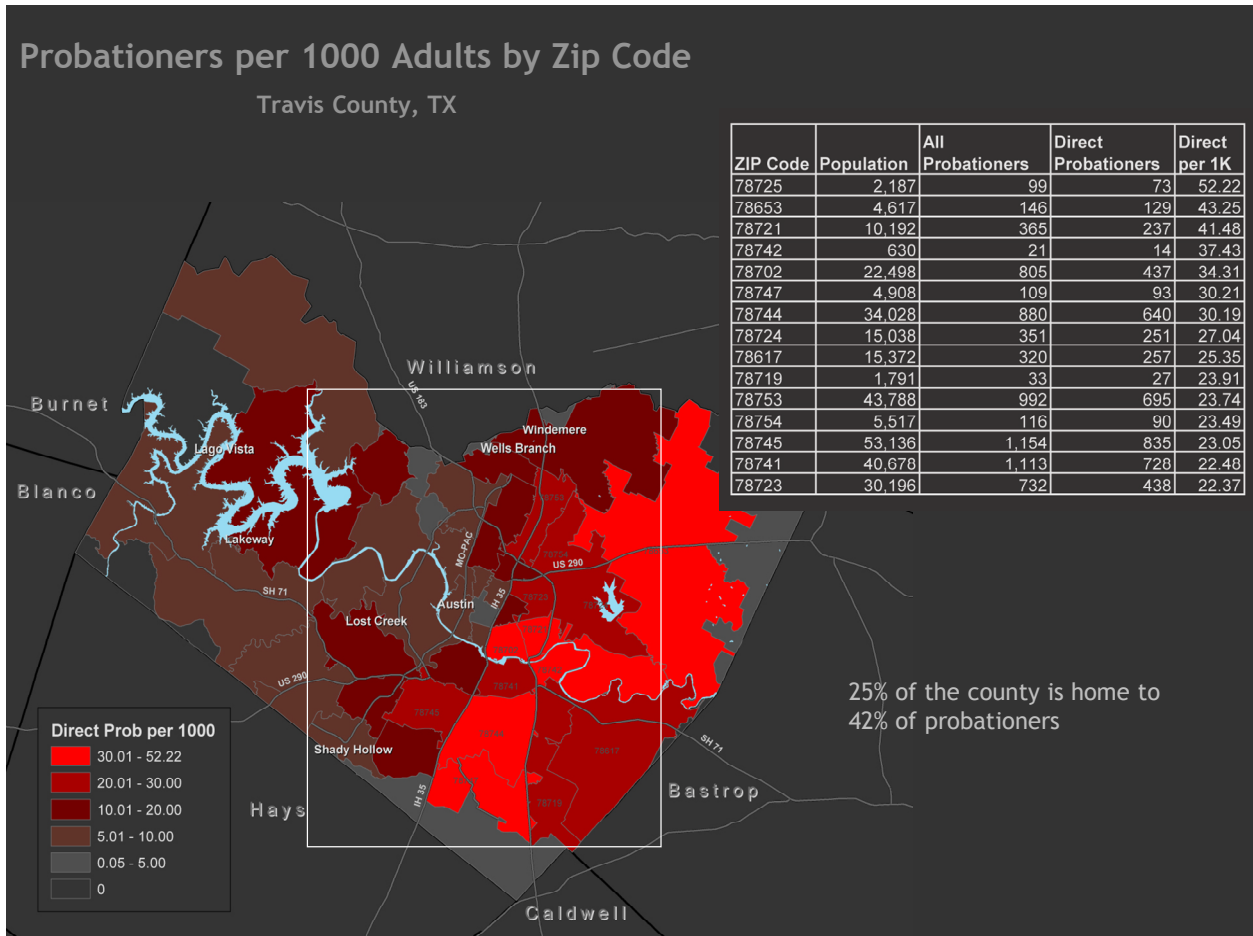


Figure 5 below shows the concentration of probationers by block group in Austin. Detailed patterns in the concentration of probationers in small neighborhood pockets are further revealed by counting probationers at the smaller block group level. Data is aggregated to the Police Sector level in the table, which shows that the highest concentration Sector, Sector C, has a probationer rate of 30 per 1000 adults, which is six times higher than its adjacent neighbor, the lowest, Sector B at 6 per 1000 adults. As noted before, Sector C also accounts for the residency of 25% of the persons released on parole or mandatory supervision. Therefore, this sector has a high concentration of probationers and parolees. The parole and probation supervision agencies do not coordinate strategies in this sector even though doing so may prove to be an effective utilization of limited resources, particularly, if neighborhood service capacity can be expanded by the economy of scales created by the concentration of the population. It is also generally unknown to each agency which probationer has a neighbor who is on parole and vice versa.

Figure 5: Probationers by Block Group, Austin, Texas Map

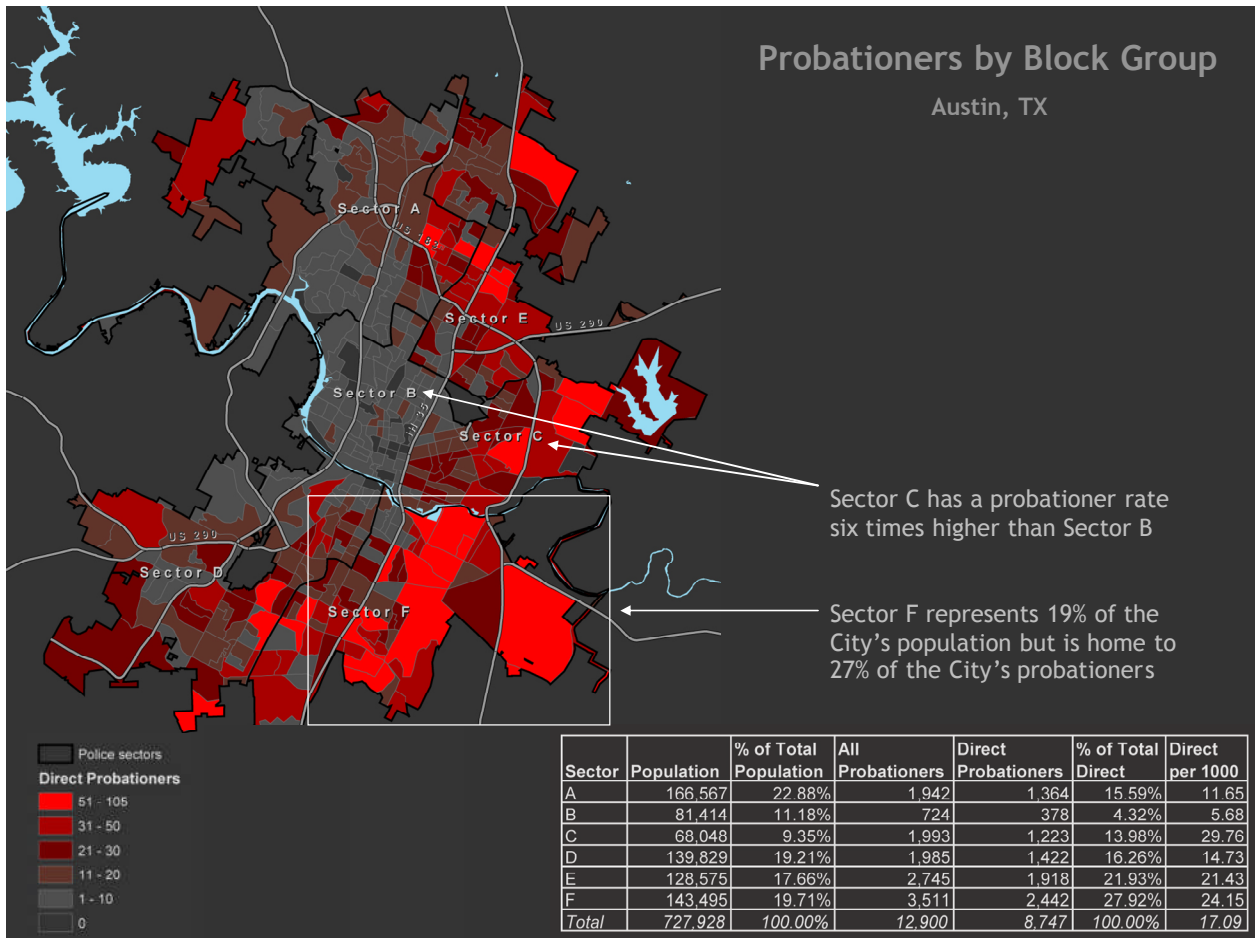
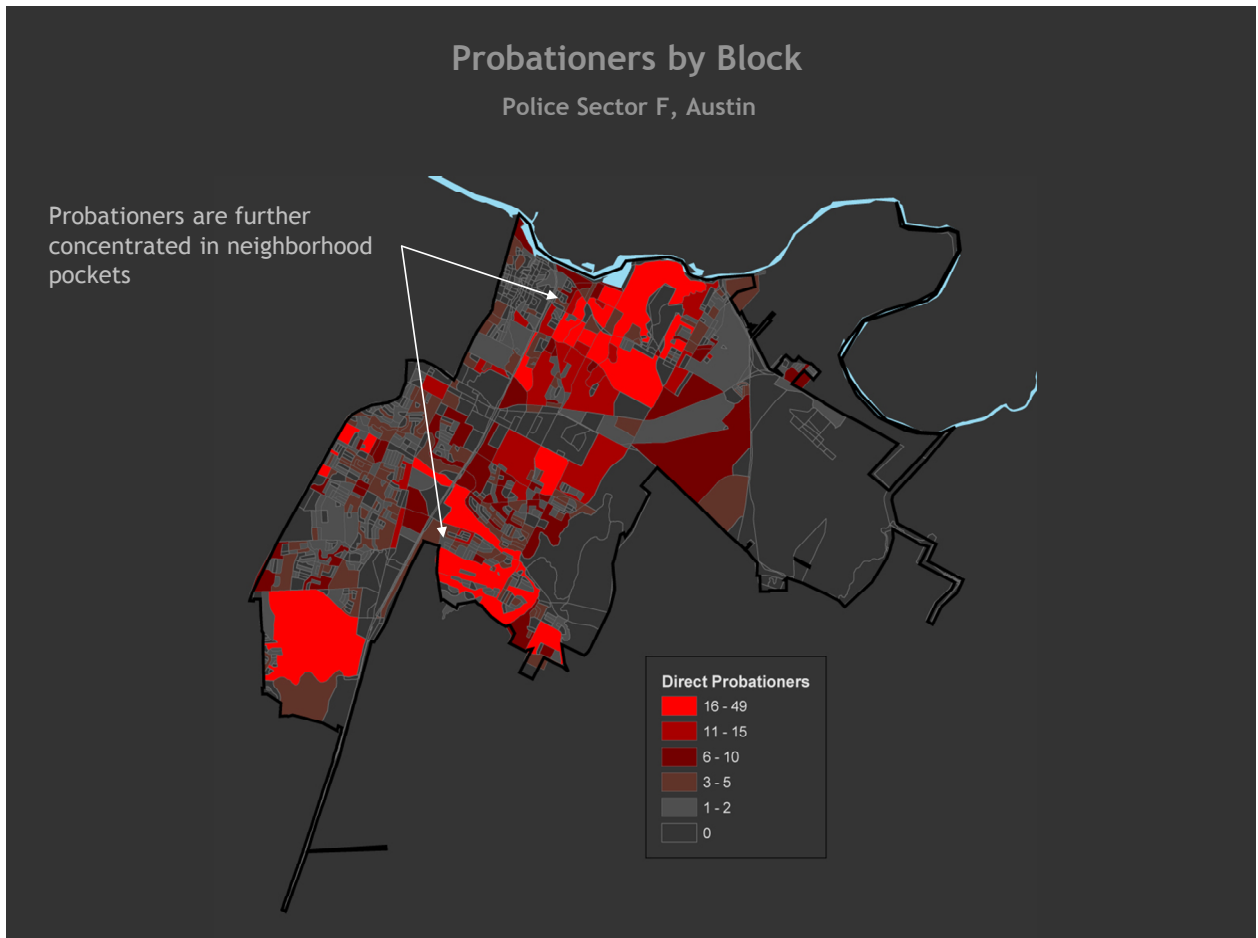


Figure 6 shows probationers by block in police Sector F in Austin. Despite what appeared to be a continuous swath of probationer residences in the census block-group map of Sector F on Figure 5, a census block level map reveals something different. It shows that two distinct neighborhood areas⁸ within the Sector—one in the northernmost section and one just south of it—account for the lion's share of probationers. At these rates, within these tightly constrained geographic areas, probation is a common experience. Sector F also received 325 discretionary prison releases accounting for 34% of the prison costs for Austin residents (not shown).

⁸ Please note that the big, bright red, block in the southern most section of the Sector is a large block where very few people live, but which looks highly populated because it is counting all the individual probationers who live all around its very long border.

Figure 6: Probationers by Block, Police Sector F, Austin Map



III. Neighborhood Based Supervision Strategies

Figure 7 below shows the probation caseload distribution in Travis County. With few exceptions, most probation and parole caseloads around the country are not organized to take full advantage of the particular patterns of residential concentrations among these populations. Figure 7 depicts the geographic distribution of two probation officers caseloads—one working out of the North Austin office, and one out of the South office, by drawing lines between the probationer's residence and the officer's office location. As can be seen, those two officers have cases in various locations in the city, even though in certain locations there are enough cases to assign a caseload to the officer just in a particular neighborhood. Presently, probationers are assigned to the north or south office if they reside in that part of the city. However, once assigned to that office, probationers are assigned to a probation officer more or less on a "wheel" system—namely, the probationers is assigned to the "next available" officer. Exceptions to this assignment system are made for cases assigned to "specialized caseloads" who are assigned to the particular officer but these cases are a minority of the cases. For the majority of cases, probation officers supervise offenders over a widespread area.

With the exception probationers on specialized caseloads, most probationers are not subjected to field visits by their probation officers and the geographical dispersion of their residency is not a factor impacting their supervision. For example, as Figure 7 depicts, the 688 probationers residing in zip code 78745 are being supervised by 72 different officers, none of whom are expected to know the neighborhood, and in general, not expected to conduct field visits. However, under the supervision strategies presently under development in the TCIS initiative, there will be the expectation that for some type of offenders there will be field visits. There will also be the expectation that probation officers get to know the offender better and the neighborhood in which he resides. Potentially, a neighborhood based supervision strategy can be implemented for locations with high concentrations of probationers.

Figure 7: Probation Caseload Distribution, Actual, Travis Map

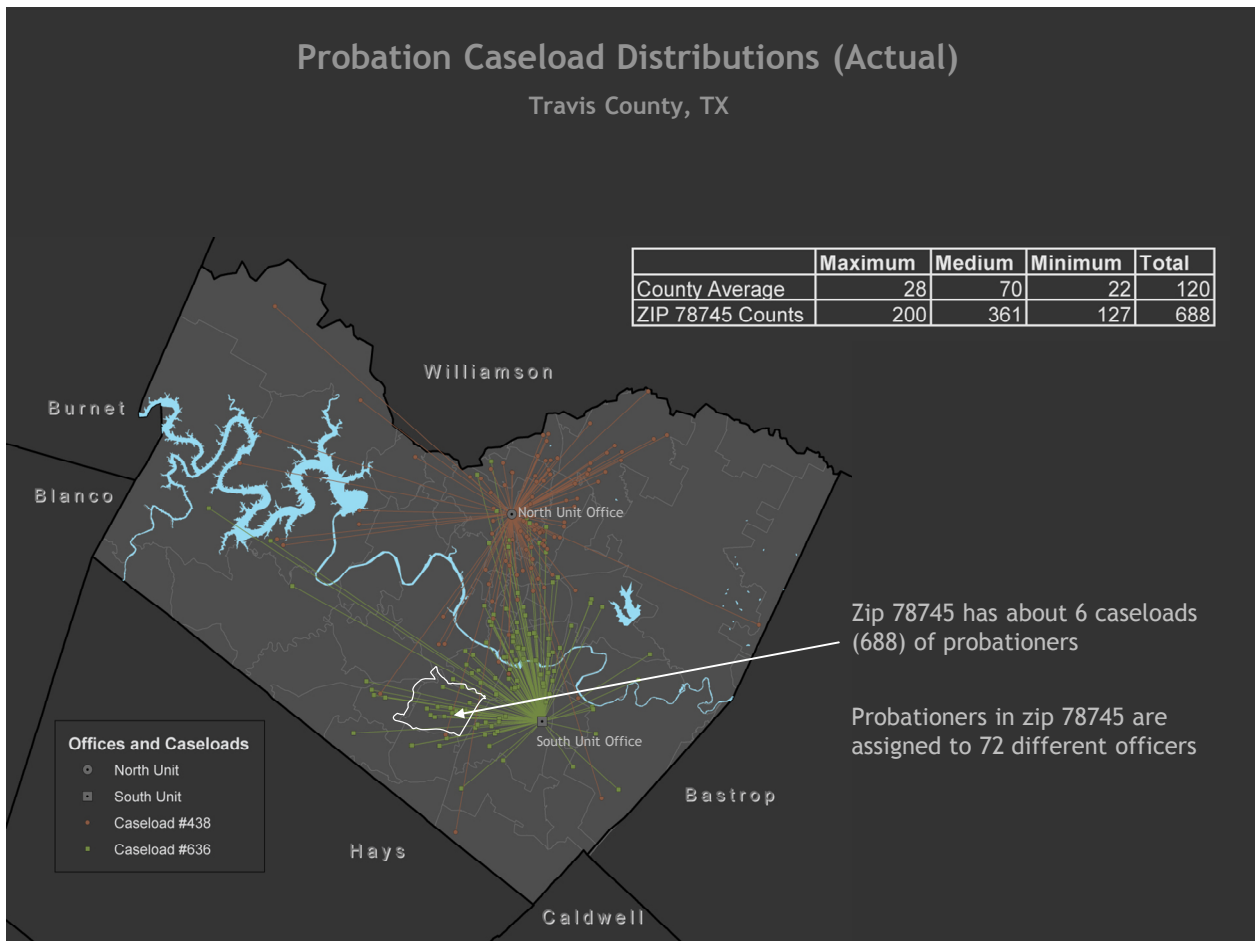
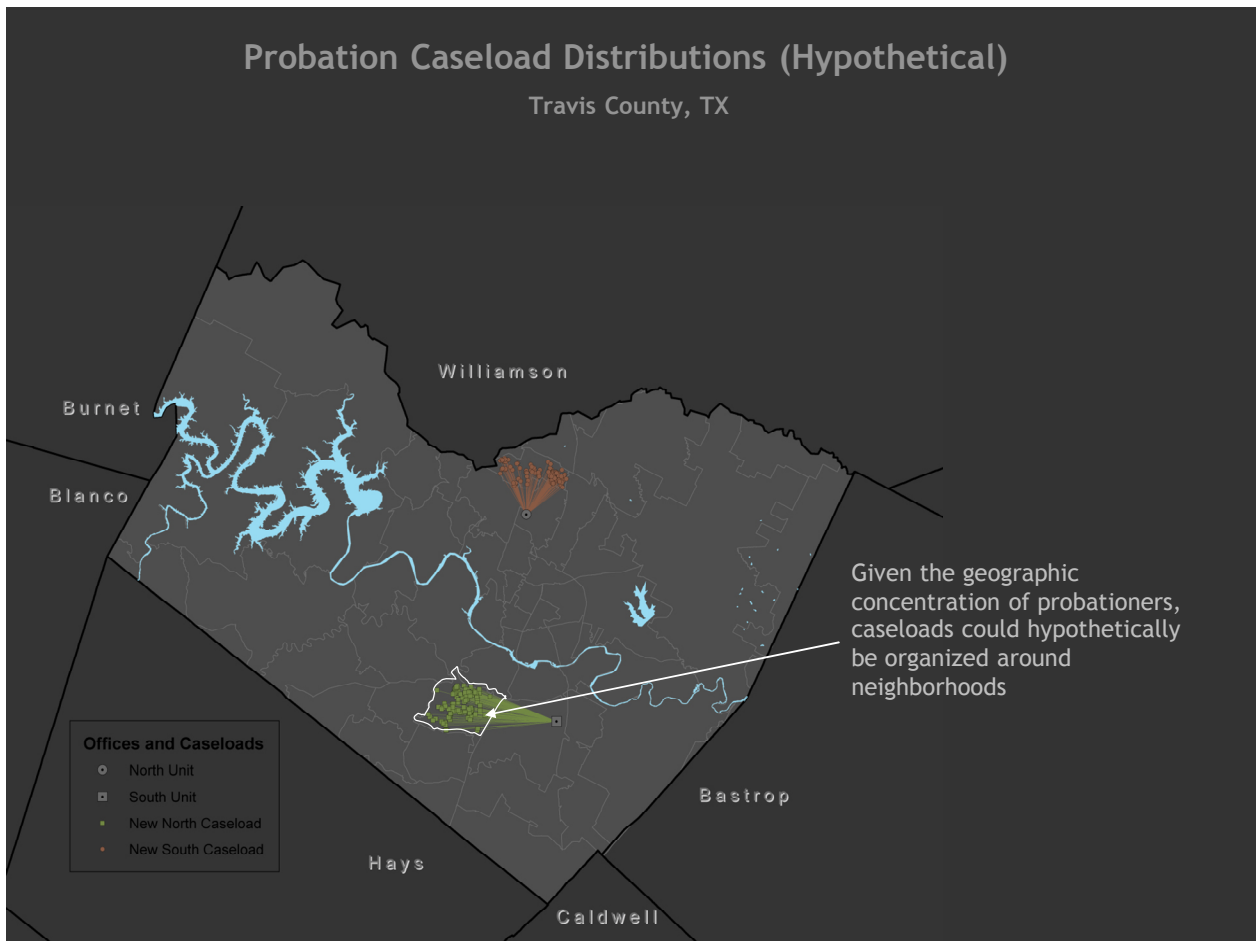


Figure 8 depicts a hypothetical caseload distribution for zip code 78745. The 688 cases in that area could be assigned to just six officers, who will then be expected to get to know that neighborhood. Field visits can also be conducted more efficiently as the officer will only have to travel to that area. Officers can get to know the neighbors of the probationers, the persons that he interacts with in the area and also learn about support structures, like the local churches, that can be used to enhance supervision strategies.

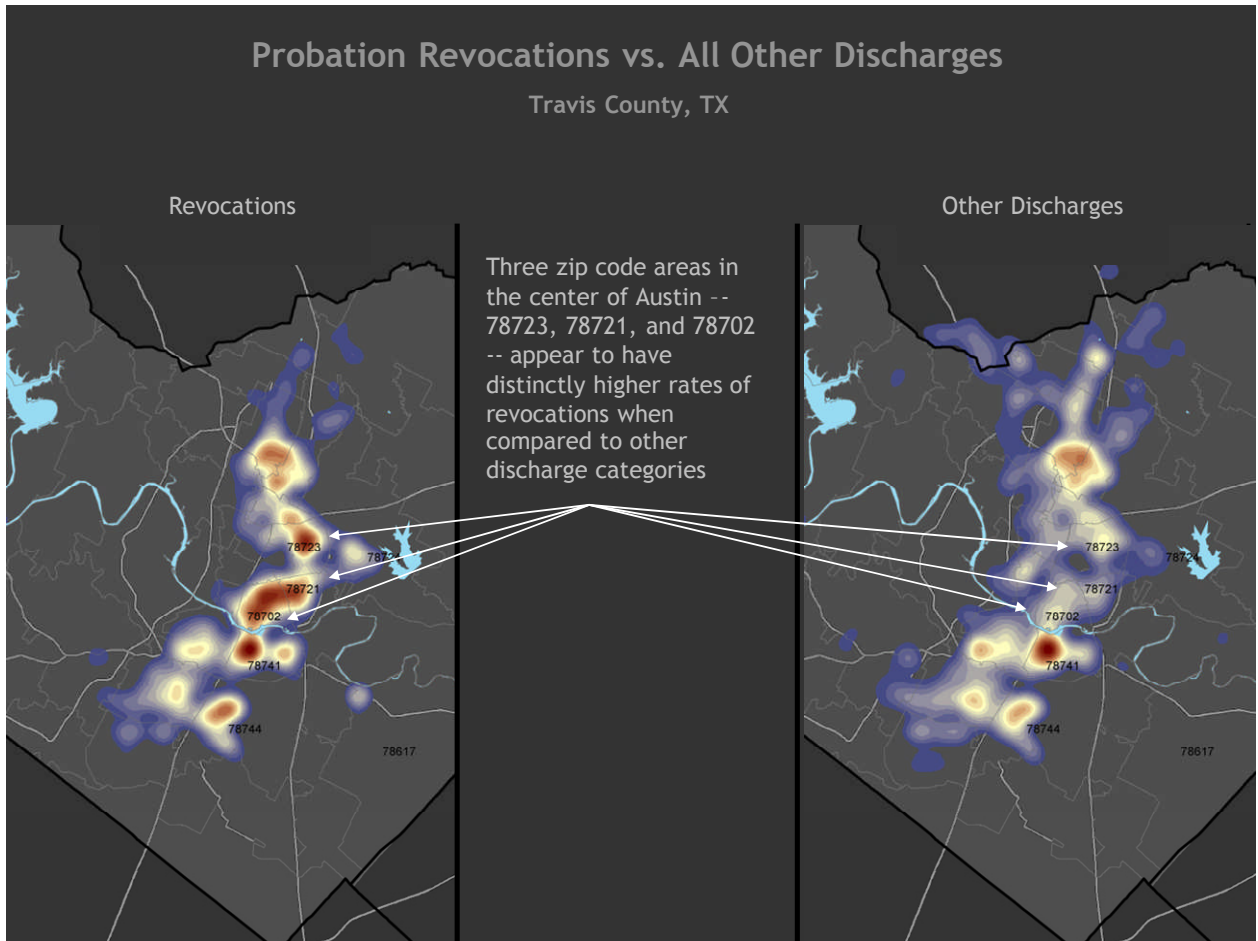
Assessed in these terms, caseloads could be re-assigned geographically so that each officer's cases lived in the same small neighborhood area. Moreover, the hypothetical reassignment could potentially lead to redeployment of officers within these same neighborhood areas, where opportunities to better respond to neighborhood priorities might emerge. This can be done in at least three neighborhoods in Travis County.

Figure 8: Probation Caseload Distribution, Hypothetical, Travis County Map



Finally, Figure 9 shows “hot spots” for probation revocations in Travis in comparison with all other discharges from probation. Initial findings are somewhat surprising. The maps use density analysis (counting probationers in both the target area and its immediate surroundings) to show that there are three “revocation hotspots” (map on left) that do not show up as hotspots for other discharge categories (map on right). Three zip code areas in the middle of Austin (78723, 78721 and 78702) seem to have distinctly higher rates of revocations when compared to other discharge categories. With the exception of those hotspots, the maps are nearly mirror images of each other. The surprising clarity with which revocation hotspots appear calls for further investigation as supervision strategies are developed that consider location as a key variable that may affect revocations.

Figure 9: Probation Revocations vs. All Other Discharges, Travis County Map



IV. Conclusion

A great number of the persons entering and exiting the Texas prison system and persons on probation tend to concentrate in specific neighborhoods in our large metropolitan areas. Visualizing these concentrations in specific geographical locations is done through the use of mapping analysis. The goal is to provide a graphic depiction of the geographical distribution of the probation population to identify high density neighborhoods that can be targeted for a neighborhood based supervision approach. The neighborhood based approach consolidates caseloads among fewer officers assigned to supervising probationers in those locations. This can be done in the Travis County in at least three neighborhoods. The research also shows that neighborhoods receiving most offenders released from prison are also neighborhoods with a high concentration of probationers. Present supervision practices between the probation and parole agencies in these neighborhoods are not coordinated. Collaboration between these agencies may lead to more effective supervision by leveraging resources between the two agencies and between the agencies and neighborhood partners.

The visualization of the location of parole and probation populations in what we call “high stakes” communities is critical to the development of more effective criminal justice policies. The notion is that, although we need policies that address the overall issue of criminality and the supervision of justice populations regardless of where offenders live, we also need to think about the locations where justice populations are concentrated. These locations tend to be in poor urban neighborhoods that also have a high proportion of persons on welfare, and relatively deficient schools. Supervision and program delivery strategies that consider the concentration of these populations in certain neighborhoods may lead to more effective policies to improve prison re-entry, reduce parole and probation revocations and enhance the neighborhood’s own capacity to promote public safety.